

Deric Shannon, Sociology, January 22, 2014  
Sociology of Food

I began developing this course with the intention of weaving sustainability into the curriculum. I started by thinking about sustainability primarily in ecological terms. The kind of large-scale industrial agriculture that we rely on in today's globalized world, after all, has been implicated in soil erosion, land degradation, pollutants in the form of dangerous pesticides and emissions that contribute significantly to global warming. The ecological dimension was easy and, given sociological work on environmental racism and contemporary political economy, it seemed it would be easy to segue from that into discussions of equity and our dominant institutions. Through the Piedmont Project, however, I was given a language around sustainability that included ecological concerns, but also questions of equity and counterposing participatory institutions with contemporary hierarchical institutions. In the syllabus, then, one can see the course beginning with sustainability, then traveling through questions of inequality and participation through studies of food and culture, political economy, and food security. Finally, we return to sustainability to re-visit what we have learned, inviting students to imagine what a world might look like with institutions—and food systems—that nurture participation, a sound ecology, and equity.



Emory University, Oxford College  
SOC 240 (Prerequisite, SOC 101)  
Sociology of Food  
Professor: Dr. Deric Shannon  
Instructor e-mail: [deric.shannon@emory.edu](mailto:deric.shannon@emory.edu)  
Office hours: ...

**Course Overview:**

Food is fundamental to being human and this course is a uniquely *sociological* investigation into food. The course will have a central focus on sustainability—broadly conceived—throughout the entire semester. From the waste produced by contemporary industrial food streams; to the (un)sustainability of industrial meat-based diets in the overdeveloped world; to labor issues in the food industry and the (un)sustainability of the attendant inequalities that emerge along lines of race, class, and gender in terms of food access, production, and preparation—sociological studies of food are never far from larger discussions about sustainability. Food is also central to culture and identity in interesting ways. Throughout this course, through engagements with readings, movies, critical discussions, writing, and, of course, food, students will focus on sociological themes as they relate to food.

**Books:**

Carolan, Michael. 2012. *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture*. New York: Routledge.

Patel, Raj. 2007. *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing.

Shiva, Vandana. 2000. *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

**Guidelines:**

1. We will be discussing sensitive topics this semester and critiquing institutions and ways of life that all of us are very familiar with and some of us have a vested interest in. Please be sensitive to differences of opinion.
2. Along with number 1, remember that you can have any opinion you want on these subjects and should never hesitate to express it. This is regardless of what you think my own positions are and those of your classmates. Open dialogue is an important feature of any democracy, and we will have open dialogue in my classroom.
3. That said, there is no reason to state things in an offensive way. Be respectful.
4. Our class schedule is SUBJECT TO CONSTANT CHANGE. It is of the utmost importance that you come to class. If you often skip classes, this one is not for you. (Note also the attendance policy).
5. We may watch films in this class with disturbing content and images. Feel free to leave anytime if you must.
6. Try to have a good time and think critically.

**Honor Code:**

All aspects of the course are governed by the Oxford College Honor Code as is articulated on the relevant pages of the Oxford College Catalog.

**Attendance Policy:**

Everyone can miss class two times throughout the semester. Students will be penalized by 2 percentage points toward their grade for every missed class after that.

**Farm Time:**

Students will spend some classroom hours working on the Oxford College Organic Farm.

**Students with Disabilities:**

Accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities. Students who need documentation or other disability-related services are advised to visit the Student Health/Counseling Center: <http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/catalog/educational-resources/disability-services/>.

**Grades:**

Grades for this course will be based on five reflection papers, one long paper, participation, group presentations, and a final exam as outlined below:

Long Paper: 30%

Reflections: 25%

Participation: 15%

Final Exams: 15%

Group Presentation: 15%

**Reflection Papers:**

Students are required to hand in a two-page reflection paper five times throughout the course. These papers can be in any format and cover any topic, provided they are related to the course. No, you may not email them to me.

**Long Paper:**

These are two 7-10 page papers. They should demonstrate critical thought about what the student has learned in class. They can take any format the student likes and suggested topics will be handed out in class three weeks before the due date.

**Final Exam:**

Students will take a *cumulative* final exam, based largely around knowledge of relevant readings and classroom activities

**Group Presentations:**

Students will be assigned groups to work with throughout the semester and present what they've researched to the class as fifteen percent of their grade. Topics and presentations will be negotiated in class among group members, subject to final approval of Dr. Shannon.

**Participation:**

Students will be graded on participation based on contributions to class discussions and possible extra credit assignments throughout the semester.

**Reading Schedule:**

SOF = *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture*

SH = *Stolen Harvest*

SS = *Stuffed and Starved*

**Week 1 – Class introductions**

Week 2 – **What is “sustainability”?** Readings: UN Brundtland Report and “Four Challenges to Sustainability” by David Orr

Week 3 – **The Global Political Economy of Food**, Readings: SOF CH.1-2, SH Pp. 1-20

Week 4 – Cont’d, Readings SOF CH. 3-4, SS CH. 1

Week 5 – Cont’d, Readings SS CH. 2-3

Week 6 – **Food and Culture**, Readings: SOF CH. 5

Week 7 – Cont’d, Readings: SOF CH. 6

Week 8 – Cont’d, Readings: SOF CH. 7

Week 9 – **Food Security, Food Sovereignty**, Readings: Handout on “Food Sovereignty”

Week 10 – Cont’d, Readings: SH Pp. 21-56

Week 11 – Cont’d, Readings: SH Pp. 57-94

Week 12 – Cont’d, Readings: SH Pp. 95-124

Week 13 – **Sustainability Revisited**, Readings: SOF CH. 8-10

Week 14 – Cont’d, Readings: SOF CH. 11, 12, 13

Week 15 – Cont’d, Readings: SS CH. 9-10

Week 16 – Wrap up and everything due